

# Employing Persons in Your Church

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Churches employ staff to facilitate the development and mission of the church and its members. While pastors are called to serve a church, other staff members are employed to insure that the church functions effectively and is faithful in its mission.

## History and Background

A division of labor was part of the early church. The classical theological understanding of the church is stated in terms of particular gifts and functions necessary for the church's life and purpose. In 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 and in Ephesians 4:1-16, there are clear statements of the kinds of gifts and functions a church demands.

Staff members are not a substitute for the ministry of the members of the church. Rather, they should call forth the gifts of the members and of other staff members. When Jayne came to manage the church office, the five church members who had worked in the office one day each week were able to use that time in other forms of ministry. Jayne arranged for Lori to prepare the newsletter, because Lori had done it so well while working in the office.

## Common Practices

Some churches have no paid staff. Church members volunteer to type and reproduce bulletins, clean the

church, play the organ, organize the educational program and lead the singing. In some churches each of these tasks is done by a paid employee of the church. Most churches have a combination of paid and volunteer workers. Many members of church staffs work part-time. Some churches share staff with other churches. Some employed persons have no time limits for employment, while others are employed for a specified duration.

In part, who participates in the process of employing staff members depends on the church structure and the position. For instance, the music committee probably participates in the search for an organist and the Christian education committee may interview directors of Christian education. If the church has a personnel committee, that committee may have full responsibility for the final decision. It's a good idea for the person who is to supervise the employee to participate in the search process. After all, those people will be working together.

## Responsibilities

Your responsibilities may depend on your position. You will be responsible for at least some of the following if you are involved in employing people for your church:

- Understanding and being committed to the church's mission.
- Explaining the church's mission to candidates

- Establishing procedures and timelines for the search process.
- Making plans for temporary coverage of the position.
- Appointing a committee to implement search procedures.
- Determining, with the appropriate boards of persons, the salary and benefits to be offered for the position. Guidelines for benefits to be considered are on the "Salary Administration" resource.
- Preparing a position description for each position, outlining responsibilities, expectations and accountability.
- Establishing and implementing an affirmative action policy.
- Advertising the position in the community.
- Determining the skills or knowledge needed in the position and ways to test for them.
- Assembling information from candidates.
- Scheduling interviews.
- Interviewing candidates.
- Informing applicants who will not be considered further.
- Offering the position to the person chosen.
- Following procedures outlined in the constitution or bylaws. Some positions may require a vote of the congregation or another group not fully involved in the search process.
- Letting the congregation know about the new staff person and providing ways she or he can

become known by the congregation.

- Establishing guidelines for periodic review and seeing that it occurs.
- When a church member becomes a paid staff members, helping the congregation and the individual make the transition.
- Negotiating salary and staying within agreed-upon guidelines.
- Screening potential employees for prior sexual abuse according to your congregation's policy.

## Skills and Attributes Needed

- Knowledge of basic personnel procedures.
- Straightforwardness.
- Understanding of and commitment to the mission of the church
- Knowledge of the requirements of each position.

## Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Consult with people who work in the field of personnel or ask them to work with you.
- Investigate the way other churches of your size deal with employment. You might want to consider ways you could work together if you cannot afford full-time staff.
- Read the 1987 General Synod resolution "United Church of

Christ Secretaries/Support Staff Just Employment Practices,” pages 80-81 from the **Minutes** of the 16<sup>th</sup> General Synod. See what implications this resolution has for your church. Check with your conference office to receive a copy of this resolution.

- Consult, “**The Church Guide to Employment Lay, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**,” by Richard R. Hammar (Matthew, N.C.: Christian Ministry Resources, 1991) for a comprehensive overview of many employment issues including a major section on “The Church as Employer.” It’s available along with other useful resources, on churchlawtoday.com.

## Issues Facing the Church

- The advisability of employing church members is debated. What is your church’s policy? Why?
- In your employment practices your church is modeling its theology. What does it say if you do not have an affirmative action policy? What does it say if you have an affirmative action policy but not affirmative action? If your church were to write an affirmative action policy, who would do it?
- When a volunteer becomes an employee, how can clarity of accountability and evaluation be established?
- Is there a point at which a church will risk the significance of

volunteer ministry as it decides to increase the number of persons who are paid?

- Because child sexual abuse occurs in the church, people who will be dealing with children should be screened before being employed. What’s your reaction to this need? How can the issue best be approached in your church?

## Questions

- Who is responsible for employing persons in your church? What determines who participates in the decision?
- Does your church have an accurate description of each position? If not, who would prepare them?
- What is the church’s responsibility to model good personnel practices?